

Thanks or no thanks: have we lost our sense of gratitude?

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Harrowing images of the [UK riots, public outrage over the \(http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-19144888\) banking scandal \(http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-22732399\)](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-19144888), and shocking failures at [Stafford Hospital \(http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2013/feb/06/mid-staffs-hospital-scandal-guide\)](http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2013/feb/06/mid-staffs-hospital-scandal-guide) have led to calls for a greater focus on social values, virtues and morality. Headlines proclaim that we are losing our moral scruples, that we have an empathy-deficit, and that we must embrace ethical, values-based practices. In response to these claims, the University of Birmingham opened The [Jubilee Centre \(http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/education/jubilee-centre/index.aspx\)](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/activity/education/jubilee-centre/index.aspx) for Character and Values in May last year, in a bid to understand and explore some of these issues., and shocking failures at have led to calls for a greater focus on social values, virtues and morality. Headlines proclaim that we are losing our moral scruples, that we have an empathy-deficit, and that we must embrace ethical, values-based practices. In response to these claims, the University of Birmingham opened The for Character and Values in May last year, in a bid to understand and explore some of these issues., and shocking failures at have led to calls for a greater focus on social values, virtues and morality.

A central theme of this pioneering research centre is 'gratitude'. Why this particular value? Gratitude is becoming increasingly popular with newspapers and radio shows, presenting segments that allow individuals to express gratitude. Take the *Metro's* Good Deed Feed, BBC Radio 4's *Saturday Live*, and BBC Radio 2's *Paul O'Grady Show*.

Clearly, gratitude is on the public's radar. But what do people *understand* by gratitude? Is it just something that oils the wheels of our social life, an expression of politeness and good manners? Or does gratitude plumb more profound moral and psychological depths, causing us to reflect on our place in the universe and encourage us to focus on what we do have rather than what is lacking?

The research project, [An Attitude for Gratitude, \(http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/442/projects/flagship-research/an-attitude-for-gratitude\)](http://www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/442/projects/flagship-research/an-attitude-for-gratitude) Over a three-year period, we will seek to understand what kinds of situation lead to gratitude and what factors influence how grateful people feel. We are using a variety of interactive methods: questionnaires, thank you letters, short films and card sorting to examine how people conceptualise gratitude, what people are grateful for and what value is placed on gratitude in our society.

We will examine whether gratitude is deemed an important character attribute and how it is perceived in relation to other values, such as honesty, justice, and compassion. We will address the question of whether some people are more grateful than others and why these individual differences might exist. For instance, does having a particular religious affiliation make people value gratitude more, and are there differences in the way in which gratitude is valued across the life span?

We would like the British public to reflect on the values that are important to them. The team will shortly be examining a large set of values. Children and adults will assess which values are most, and least, important to them, and will think about the amount of attention they pay to these values. We hope this task will encourage members of the public to stop and think about character and values, to discover what values are important to them, and, if necessary, modify the amount of attention paid to these values in the future.

Members of the public wishing to take part or find out more about more about this research are invited to the [Community Open Day \(http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/community/communityday/index.aspx\)](http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/community/communityday/index.aspx) this Sunday, where participants will be encouraged to make a short video in our 'Thank You Film Booth', or post a thank you letter in our life-size postbox. this Sunday, where participants will be encouraged to make a short video in our 'Thank You Film Booth', or post a thank you letter in our life-size postbox.

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